Endline evaluation of Share-Net International Rapid Improvement Model (SHIRIM) III - Share-Net International (SNI)

A summary of the final evaluation report - RAISE Global Health

Executive Summary:

Share-Net International (SNI) operates as a leading knowledge-sharing platform in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), comprising a membership network across seven countries. In 2017, SNI initiated the Share-Net International Rapid Improvement Model (SHIRIM) to enhance knowledge exchange among country hubs, aiming to bolster capacities and foster collaboration. This evaluation utilized feminist evaluation methodology with a focus on qualitative research to examine SHIRIM III's impact on capacity strengthening, knowledge exchange, and policy/practice influence, addressing a number of underlying assumptions. It also evaluated SHIRIM III based on the OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

Interviews, focus group discussions, and a comprehensive desk review revealed a multifaceted landscape of successes, challenges, and opportunities. SHIRIM III was widely praised for its transformative capacity strengthening, facilitating innovative approaches both within and beyond SRHR spaces. Participants highlighted dynamic knowledge exchange, collaborative tool development, and effective advocacy strategies. While policy/practice impacts were early to assess, successes were noted in advocacy efforts across hubs. Resource utilization varied among hubs, with calls for more flexibility and contextualization to ensure equitable impacts. Participants invested considerable voluntary effort, highlighting the need for fair compensation and strategic financial planning from SNI. In terms of sustainability, SHIRIM III laid groundwork for future collaboration but sustainability hinges on hub longevity and institutionalization. Challenges persist in institutionalizing knowledge translation and dissemination strategies.

The evaluation emphasizes navigating value differences, recognizing power dynamics, and contextualizing interventions. It highlights the need for nuanced definitions of success and progress, urging comprehensive approaches sensitive to diverse contexts. Recommendations include ongoing reflection on value differences, context-specific planning, flexible financing mechanisms, enhanced translation efforts, sustained engagement, bridging the gap between older and newer hubs, and establishing sustainable follow-up mechanisms for knowledge products. In conclusion, SHIRIM III demonstrates significant progress in fostering collaboration and capacity strengthening, albeit with challenges in resource allocation and sustainability. Moving forward, targeted strategies are essential to address context-specific needs and ensure lasting impacts in SRHR advocacy and practice.

Background:

Share-Net International (SNI) is a leading knowledge-sharing platform dedicated to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). SNI works as a membership network composed of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), researchers, policymakers, implementers, advocates, students, media, and companies engaged in the SRHR field. These stakeholders come together in the form of country hubs to facilitate SRHR discussions and knowledge sharing across seven countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Colombia, Ethiopia, Jordan, and the Netherlands. In response to identified limitations in knowledge exchange between the country hubs, SNI initiated the Share-Net International Rapid Improvement Model (SHIRIM) in 2017. This model sought to enhance the understanding of knowledge translation strategies, build the capacity of participating staff in knowledge management and brokering, and foster collaboration among the hubs. This report evaluated the progress of the model in its third iteration: SHIRIM III.

RAISE approached this evaluation through a feminist lens, focusing on qualitative research methods. By combining ethical feminist principles with context-specific evaluation techniques, the RAISE team conducted interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), ensuring participants had ample opportunity to share their experiences with SHIRIM III. Individual interviews with key stakeholders were semi-structured, allowing for both flexibility and focus. FGDs provided a platform for collective reflection, enabling participants to engage in dialogue, share diverse viewpoints, and construct meaning around their shared experiences. The analysis process adopted a bottom-up perspective, acknowledging the evolving nuances captured during the study. These evaluation techniques were complemented by a desk review to gain a broader contextual understanding of SHIRIM III and SNI. The combined evaluation of qualitative interviews, FGDs, and the desk review aimed to provide a holistic view of SHIRIM III, enhancing the validity and reliability of the evaluation..

Evaluation Questions and Assumptions:

This evaluation aimed to answer the following questions:
- Capacity Strengthening: How and to what extent does the SHIRIM III trajectory strengthen capacities of Share-Net hubs and their members on knowledge translation tools and their use?
- Knowledge Exchange: How and to what extent does the SHIRIM III trajectory facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences between participants at a national and international level?
- Policy and Practice: How and to what extent have the knowledge products generated in SHIRIM III influenced policy and practice on the selected SRHR themes?

Furthermore, it aimed to examine six assumptions underlying SHIRIM III that have not yet been evaluated:
- Assumption 1: Exploring and experimenting with knowledge translation approaches/strategies lead to the development of knowledge products that can influence policy and/or practice on selected SRHR themes.
- Assumption 2: Facilitated exchange between Share-Net hub secretariats, members, and partners during SHIRIM national learning sessions enhances policy influencing and practice in national contexts.
- Assumption 3: International SHIRIM learning sessions provide a safe space to exchange best practices and lessons learned between Share-Net hubs.
- Assumption 4: Hub participants of the international learning sessions are capacitated to replicate the learning sessions at a country-level.
- Assumption 5: Knowledge translation is institutionalized in the Share-Net hubs by strengthening their capacity and through collaborating and exchanging between and among their members.
- Assumption 6: Dissemination strategies used by the hubs facilitate the uptake of knowledge in policy and practice.

Lastly, it aimed to evaluate SHIRIM III based on six aspects using the OECD-DAC criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. These criteria served as benchmarks to assess the overall performance and outcomes of SHIRIM III.

Key Findings:

General Perception on SHIRIM III:

In all hubs, evaluation participants consistently expressed positive attitudes towards and appreciation for SHIRIM III. They valued its unique approach of fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange among diverse stakeholders, rather than solely disseminating information. Furthermore, SHIRIM III was seen as encouraging innovation and complementing existing methodologies, sparking interest and commitment among SRHR organizations. Its emphasis on participatory and collaborative approaches facilitated a shared process involving diverse stakeholders to develop contextually relevant tools, strategies, and knowledge. Participants expressed a desire to continue discussions and initiatives related to identified issues, reflecting a positive impact on awareness and community involvement.

Effectiveness:

Participants appreciated the capacity strengthening facilitated by SHIRIM III within the hubs, noting its transformative impact on their work and processes. Capacity strengthening wasn't limited to individuals but also enhanced organizational capacities, and some participants even found that SHIRIM III enhanced capacities in fields beyond SRHR. SHIRIM III served as a "meeting hub" for like-minded stakeholders, easing discomfort around sensitive SRHR issues in challenging environments. Several participants underscored SHIRIM III's unique capability to encourage them to break away from their usual perspective and comfort zones, prompting a fresh and different outlook, and strengthening the skills needed to loop in other organizations working on similar issues in SRHR.

In SHIRIM III, participants actively shared technical expertise. A collaborative and participatory approach enabled hubs to more easily identify existing knowledge and build on it, increasing efficiency. This contrasted with traditional siloed methods, and fostered dynamic knowledge exchange within hubs. SHIRIM III also facilitated links between different knowledge spheres, such as SRHR and climate change, while also promoting experience sharing between hubs. Participants found the opportunities to engage with other hubs valuable, acknowledging the open and collaborative atmosphere cultivated by SNI, particularly during in-person interaction, improved the learning process.

Within SHIRIM III, knowledge sharing extended to advocacy work. Organizations new to advocacy initiatives benefited from insights and strategies, facilitating effective engagement. Participants also shared networks, enabling mutual support in accessing decision-makers. Notably, SHIRIM III provided opportunities for expanding perspectives on how SRHR advocates worldwide position themselves within their unique political contexts and "make a common language between them."

Knowledge exchange within SHIRIM III also extended to tangible tools like manuals, guides, and books. Participants praised their accessibility, adaptability, as well as their ability to be contextualized and implemented successfully through an iterative "journey". However, they acknowledged challenges such as language barriers, limitations on contextualization, and financial constraints. Ensuring the longevity and accessibility of these tools may require ongoing support, language adjustments, and further training for hubs to adapt and utilize them effectively. Having a dedicated guidebook or tool list for future reference is also essential.

During the evaluation, an observation was made regarding SNI's perspective on SHIRIM III's achievements. While there was agreement that fostering collaborative approaches for knowledge translation was crucial, there was dissonance regarding what constitutes success—whether a good process or a good outcome. This highlighted the need for synergy within the SNI team to determine the balance between investing in process and outcomes, and how success can be redefined within a process-oriented approach. Process indicators can help assess learning trajectories, collaboration, and sharing between hubs in future iterations.

Impact:

Most participants stated that it was too early to determine impacts on policy or practice at the evaluation time, given the complexity of SRHR issues and the duration of SHIRIM III. This was especially evident in newer hubs. However, participants across all hubs acknowledged SHIRIM III's crucial role in enhancing and

expanding their advocacy efforts in the SRHR realm, and insights from interviews highlighted both challenges and enablers. Advocating for SRHR, as currently undertaken by the hubs, faces numerous challenges reflecting the complex landscape of participants' operations. These include navigating taboos surrounding SRHR, inconsistent prioritization of issues across countries, resource constraints, slow policy changes, diverse perspectives in culturally heterogeneous contexts, difficulty accessing accurate SRHR data, and lack of recognition for organizations' expertise by public institutions. However, several enablers for change pathways were also identified, with differences noted between hubs. In Bangladesh, strong dedication of hub staff and members to SHIRIM III and SNI, coupled with a well-established in-country network supported by SHIRIM III, were significant enablers. Their longer existence as a hub and prior experience with similar activities during the first SHIRIM cycle contributed to their strength. Hosting by a private non-NGO entity also proved beneficial. Similarly, Jordan, another early hub, benefited from longer experience with SHIRIM and an established network, hosted by a government entity, providing direct access to policymakers. Notably, the Jordanian team demonstrated skills in navigating strategies for SRHR in a religious conservative setting while effectively engaging with government officials, offering valuable insights for others.

Efficiency and Resources:

The evaluation revealed diverse experiences and opinions among hubs regarding resource utilization. While participants generally maximized resources available to them, there was a consensus that more flexible and contextualized resources are needed for equitable impacts. According to SNI, each hub budgeted for its own SHIRIM cycle and received requested funds. As such, this suggests that there may be a need for more support from SNI in strategic financial planning and budgeting for a SHIRIM journey.

It was also evident during the evaluation that participants invested significant effort into SHIRIM III beyond expected scope due to passion for SRHR and respect for SNI. This collective commitment was pivotal for initiative success. However, collaboration with the COP was voluntary, without financial compensation. Consequently, it is crucial for SNI to acknowledge and address the additional effort invested by those engaged in SHRIM III, seeking suitable means to fairly compensate for their extra commitment. The evaluation also revealed some critical insights on how volunteer work for SHIRIM III and SNI in general could have exploitative tendencies (albeit unintended) for community organizations meant to be the beneficiaries. Voluntary work was seen as in need for proper compensation especially in regards to economy and livelihood.

Participants generally saw SHIRIM III as a unique knowledge brokering strategy, although some hubs had prior experience with similar tools and approaches. However, SHIRIM III is still seen as an important (complementary) effort to what has existed before. Concerns about duplication of efforts within SHIRIM III were noted, reflecting broader challenges of fragmented efforts in the SRHR field. This underscores the importance of coherent, well-coordinated, and context-sensitive approaches across stakeholders within SHIRIM III, SNI, and beyond in the broader SRHR space.

Sustainability:

SHIRIM III has laid the groundwork for collaboration and exchange practices within hubs, vital for future endeavors. However, sustainability hinges on the longer existence of some hubs and their networks. In newer hubs, practices exchanged may not yet be institutionalized, with stakeholders viewing SHIRIM III more as an initiative than a sustained project. The concern of programs and products lasting only as long as funding persists remains a classic development sector challenge.

Coherence:

Overall, participants felt that SHIRIM III aligned well with SNI's strategic plan and Theory of Change (ToC), as well as with the policies and strategies of their organizations. They also noted alignment with international conventions and agreements, indicating harmony with global SRHR policy frameworks. However, participants acknowledged that international trends are subject to political shifts.

Alignment with relevant policies, strategies, and initiatives at local and national levels was more complex due to various reasons. Newer hubs are still building networks and determining relevant and impactful topics.

Some struggled with local prioritization, readiness, and commitment to action, particularly among key decision-makers in government, and are still working to figure out the best ways to gain buy-in. Participants also noted societal conflicts in some hubs, especially regarding issues like homosexuality, where global trends clash with domestic values.

Relevance:

The effectiveness of SHIRIM III in addressing stakeholders' needs and overcoming obstacles varied based on the strategies employed. Ownership and flexibility granted to hubs were appreciated for relevance, allowing them to use a bottom-up approach in determining pertinent and feasible topics, tools, and strategies. However, aligning topics between hubs posed challenges due to their country-specific focus, making it difficult to build synergies. Participants from SNI expressed their initial struggle in finding or establishing thematic - but also value-related - alignments between hubs (and between them and SNI) related to these contextual differences.

At the hub level, the session on value clarification during the international learning sessions helped the participants understand each other's contexts better, generating more empathy and understanding of the diversities within SHIRIM III. Another interesting value-related dynamic revealed during the evaluation was how participants from SNI expressed that they and their team had to navigate the definition of "acceptable" to share the knowledge products internationally under their brand in the space of SRHR-related values. While the shape some of the knowledge products took may not be in complete alignment with SNI's ToC or their expected levels of so-called "progressiveness", eventually the latter had to step back to allow for multi-perspectivity and define "progress" and "impact" along the lines of - and what would actually work in - each hub's context. Contextualization emerged as a significant aspect of SHIRIM III, viewed as successful for some hubs and an ongoing process for others. This contextualization also means that impact, success, or progress may vary between hubs.

Assumptions' verification:

- **Assumption 1: Exploring and experimenting with knowledge translation approaches/strategies lead to the development of knowledge products that can influence policy and/or practice on selected SRHR themes - *Partial verification*:** Burundi's focus shifted towards community practices rather than policy influence, while Bangladesh demonstrated affirmative outcomes consistent with the hypothesis. Colombia's policies are already progressive or moving in a "pro-rights" direction. They are still refining their final product *Parches Diversos*, and focusing on changing social and cultural dynamics necessary for practice change to take place. Burkina Faso, in early stages of their journey, shows potential for positive trajectory through advocacy coalition building. Jordan's experience suggests indirect influence on policy making and practice change but with the ability to attract attention from both policy makers and practitioners, while Ethiopia, still in the exploration phase, shows promise, particularly in influencing the practices of smaller organizations in its network and in growing collaborative advocacy work beyond SNI. Thus, the overarching conclusion leans towards verification of the assumption.

- **Assumption 2: Facilitated exchange between Share-Net hub secretariats, members, and partners during SHIRIM national learning sessions enhances policy influencing and practice in national contexts - *Partial verification*:** Burundi's focus on beneficiaries over policymakers diverges from the assumption, while Burkina Faso's advocacy success aligns positively. Colombia's early-stage assessment shows progress in practice change, indicating potential for policy change. Bangladesh's evidence-based approach suggests a positive impact on policy influence. Jordan and Ethiopia's experiences highlight the effectiveness of facilitated exchanges, partially verifying the assumption with varying alignment across countries.

- **Assumption 3: International SHIRIM learning sessions provide a safe space to exchange best practices and lessons learned between Share-Net hubs - *Partial verification*:** Diverse impacts of international learning sessions across hubs highlight their varying responses. Despite potential variations in hub

participation due to unforeseen circumstances, the sessions were deemed invaluable for fostering a safe and supportive space for sharing experiences and insights. Challenges such as language barriers present opportunities for enhancing cross-hub interactions to be more inclusive and effective.

- **Assumption 4: Hub participants of the international learning sessions are capacitated to replicate the learning sessions at a country-level -** *Partial verification:* Jordan's experiences highlight confident adaptation and contextualization of tools, informed by lessons from international sessions. In contrast, hubs like Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Colombia underscore the challenges in contextualizing generalized approaches in diverse national settings. Despite variations, the overall reflection suggests the need for nuanced approaches, recognizing the unique socio-political contexts of each hub. This insight emphasizes the importance of fostering adaptability and providing tailored support to enhance the effective replication of international learning sessions within diverse national frameworks.

- **Assumption 5: Knowledge translation is institutionalized in the Share-Net hubs by strengthening their capacity and through collaborating and exchanging between and among their members -** *Partial verification:* Some hubs, like Jordan and Bangladesh, demonstrate robust institutionalization characterized by significant capacity building, collaboration, and stable networks. In contrast, others, such as Burundi and Burkina Faso, show a more evolving and context-specific trajectory. Burundi's focus on making SRHR knowledge accessible to beneficiaries and Burkina Faso's reliable network suggest potential foundations for future institutionalization in advocacy work. While Colombia's success in knowledge translation is evident, the explicit level of institutionalization remains unclear. Ethiopia presents a mixed perspective, with smaller organizations appreciating the knowledge brokering aspect.

- **Assumption 6: Dissemination strategies used by the hubs facilitate the uptake of knowledge in policy and practice -** *Partial verification:* The overall assessment reveals varying success levels in disseminating knowledge across evaluated hubs. Burundi and Bangladesh are recognized for effective strategies tailored to diverse audiences, while Ethiopia faces challenges in broader dissemination despite successful media engagement. Jordan demonstrates a multifaceted approach with an ongoing dissemination plan. These nuanced findings underscore the importance of tailored strategies and effective platforms for successful SRHR knowledge uptake in policy and practice.

Discussion and Reflection:

The evaluation has identified that value 'clash' can impact how stakeholders shape definition of success and the need to contextualize approach while itself also operates within the mechanism of power dynamics. A certain 'degree of progressiveness' has (at least partly) influenced the so-called international expectation of success or progress for SRHR issues across a set of diverse countries, existing in a power relationship (between donor-recipient, international coordinator - country implementers, or similar) that is also related to how an international branding is maintained by the donor/coordinator in the space. However, this expectation does not necessarily reflect reality on the ground. While human rights principles must always be upheld as the ultimate standard, this was a lesson learned regarding how to decolonize an intervention in the SRHR space and make it more sensitive to specific context in which the progress is expected to happen and how progress looks like. This navigation is and will likely continue to be a consistent presence in the SRHR space.

The evaluation brings to the forefront a range of inequity issues that impact the hubs, reflecting the complex socio-political and economic landscapes in which they operate. This includes language barriers; status of country's stability; hub's experience and duration of existence within SHIRIM; characteristics of organizations that host each hub, their affiliations, and political and cultural realities; Financial accessibility and ownership of tools; and potentially global/structural racial dynamics and/or ethnocentrism (e.g., visa inequity).

The traditional metrics of success often focus on tangible outcomes, such as policy changes or the immediate impact on practice. However, the diverse contexts of hubs necessitate a more nuanced understanding of success. Success might manifest in building resilient networks, fostering collaborative relationships, or

initiating conversations in environments where SRHR topics are often marginalized or stigmatized. It calls for a re-definition of evaluating success, urging a comprehensive approach that values both the tangible outcomes and the intricate processes that contribute to the long-term impact of the SNI initiatives.

The theme of contextualization emerges as a significant aspect in the evaluation. Furthermore, the recognition that the value of the SHIRIM III process extends beyond merely the final knowledge product - and that the products itself are not its end goal and not always sufficient - underscores the importance of creating spaces for meaningful discussions and strategic planning in the light of the need for contextualization.

Recommendations:

- Encourage ongoing reflection on navigating value differences at SNI, hubs, and in-between levels, recognizing the impact of power dynamics such as ethnocentrism. This continuous process can sustain meaningful relationships within the SNI network. In conservative contexts, efforts should be made to avoid putting hubs and staff in risky situations between legislative frameworks, social norms, and meeting objectives.

- Incorporate the specific contexts of the hubs into the planning and development stage of the next cycle, allowing for power sharing in planning, design, and decision-making. While hubs know their context best, they may require technical support to implement solutions and use resources effectively.

- Develop monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) tools and processes that are flexible enough to accommodate the diverse definitions of success and progress across different contexts of the hubs involved. This should include active participation of the hubs in designing these tools, such as ToC and outcome indicators. Integrate a monitoring mechanism into the project design itself, complementing the endline evaluation, especially at the hub level. Monitor the process of knowledge product creation, stakeholders reached, and organizations or allies involved, ensuring that it does not unnecessarily burden the hubs and is supported by needed resources.

- Engage hubs in the financial planning and implementation process, allowing for flexibility in financing mechanisms. Collaboratively decide on resource allocation and design grant mechanisms to accommodate diverse contexts. Consider the geographical and contextual factors within each hub's country to ensure equitable distribution of financial resources, enabling outreach to remote areas or communities. Support earmarking and distribution of funds down to the member level to ensure fair compensation for all hub members' time and effort. This support could be facilitated by SNI or through peer-to-peer training from hubs with successful compensation practices.

- Allocate additional resources and technical support for contextualization and dissemination efforts. This entails funding for language translation, multimedia production, fieldwork, and data disaggregation. Involve community members in discussions and sessions alongside SRHR practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to enhance contextualization. Ensure that shared tools are relevant, accessible, and sustainable beyond project implementation by removing financial barriers to access and establishing a collective manual for ongoing use.

- Promote independent leadership within country hubs during learning sessions. Empower hubs to make decisions autonomously while fostering communication and collaboration among them. This approach allows hubs to be more relevant and responsive to their unique contexts.

- Identify and address inequitable outcomes experienced by different groups. Develop strategies to mitigate language barriers, visa inequality, and passport disparities. Identify marginalized communities and populations not reached by current efforts and allocate resources accordingly to ensure more equitable engagement.

- Promote continuous engagement and communication among SNI, hubs, and hub members, providing technical and financial support. Encourage sustained networking to achieve more sustainable outcomes. Allow hubs time and space to share challenges, mitigation strategies, and lessons learned, especially beneficial for newer hubs. Consider offering monetary incentives such as coffee/tea vouchers, communication cost compensation, and childcare support to incentivize participation in events and meetings, both virtual and in-person.

- Develop and implement a dedicated strategy to bridge the gap between older and newer hubs. This strategy may involve specialized knowledge exchange sessions tailored to hub development, network management, facilitation skills for national networks, and advocacy strategies.

- Allocate resources to enhance the translation of knowledge products into actionable policies and practices. This may involve additional efforts to ensure guidelines reach the appropriate audience effectively and are implemented. Support should also be provided for ongoing advocacy efforts to influence policy makers and governments to adopt the knowledge and enact policy changes.

- Establish sustainable follow-up mechanisms both within and among the hubs after the creation and completion of knowledge products. This is particularly crucial for hubs that have yet to present their products to policymakers or lawmakers.